

Executive Summary

This *Action Plan* presents a multi-faceted, multi-modal approach for improving safety at our Nation's highway-rail crossings and for the prevention of trespassing on the rights-of-way of our Nation's railroads. It is multi-faceted in that it presents enforcement, engineering, education, research, promotional and legislative initiatives addressing crossings of both light and conventional rail rights-of-way by public and private streets and highways. It is multi-modal in that contributions to its preparation have been made by four U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) administrations, i.e., the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), working together with the same interest, safety at crossings. We have also received, considered and often incorporated or adapted, in whole or in part, ideas from many outside sources, individuals, railroads and States.

The *Action Plan* identifies six major initiatives encompassing 55 individual proposals. The major initiatives are:

- I. Increased Enforcement of Traffic Laws at Crossings
- II. Rail Corridor Crossing Safety Improvement Reviews
- III. Increased Public Education and Operation Lifesaver
- IV. Safety at Private Crossings
- V. Data and Research
- VI. Trespass Prevention

These are followed by Recommendations and a Goal and two Appendixes.

The essence of the *Action Plan* lies in fifty-five proposals. They can generally be divided into two groups: 1) Those which describe programs targeting individual needs;

and 2) Those which will enable or provide incentives for a program's advancement.

Of those in the first category, highlights would include initiatives to:

- Establish the goal of eventual crossing elimination or warning device upgrades at all National Highway System crossings.
- Increase truck and bus driver awareness of crossing safety through education and consideration of revocation of the Commercial Driver's License for crossing violations.
- Emphasize state traffic law enforcement programs through NHTSA Section 402 funds, as well as police and judicial education and outreach on crossing safety.
- Consolidate state crossing safety assessments to emphasize corridor review, and integrate intermodal planning to bring together railroads, MPOs and state DOTs to insure emphasis on crossing issues.
- Expand Operation Lifesaver (OL) through new community assistants sponsored by the Corporation for National Service, upgrade OL advertising and public awareness efforts and implement new regional trespass prevention programs.
- Enhance research and data collection in such areas as accident severity, prediction formulas, crossing inventories, reporting requirements, and safety and demographic data.
- Demonstrate and encourage new technologies, such as vehicle detection and four quadrant gates, automated malfunction report handling, and new lighting and marking systems.
- Work with States to develop model codes for state laws for crossing and trespass prevention, along with information package on rules of evidence.

Taken together, these initiatives represent a comprehensive Departmental effort, elevating highway-rail crossing safety, and adopting a uniform strategy across the modal administrations to deal with this important issue.

The *Action Plan* proposes some major legislative initiatives. These proposals include:

- Establishing fiscal incentives to states for crossing consolidations.
- Establishing fiscal incentives to states for participating in corridor reviews and projects.
- Increasing Operation Lifesaver funding from the Department to \$600,000 per year.
- Including trespass prevention programs within the scope of Operation Lifesaver funding.

In 1972, then Secretary of Transportation John A. Volpe declared a goal of reducing the

number of highway-rail crossing accidents and fatalities by one third within ten years. The meeting of that goal was clearly attributable to Congress' endorsement and support in the establishment in 1973 of the Highway-Rail Crossing Safety Improvement program, a program which has been continuously funded and supported (by Congress, States and industry) to this day. Concurrently, Operation Lifesaver made its debut in Idaho. With funding support from Congress, Operation Lifesaver programs have become very effective.

The continuation and renewal of this partnership, between Congress, the Department of Transportation and the modal administrations, the States, the industry and Operation Lifesaver, as proposed in this *Action Plan*, will produce similar results, i.e., a further reduction in accidents and fatalities at highway-rail crossings of at least fifty percent over the next ten years. Before the year 2004, accidents per year should be less than 2,500 and fatalities less than 300.